

Klaudy K. 1999. The Theory of Dynamic Contrasts.
Translational Behaviour of Languages. Friendly and Unfriendly Language-Pairs
In: Lugris, A.A. (ed.) *Proceedings of the Vigo Conference*. Vigo: Univ. of Vigo. I. 53–65.

The Theory of Dynamic Contrasts. Translational Behaviour of Languages. Friendly and Unfriendly Language-Pairs

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Introduction

In my lecture today I would like to shed a new light upon an old topic: the **relevance of linguistics** to TS. I would like to introduce several new concepts for example "translation behaviour of languages", "translation friendly or unfriendly language pairs" "resistance of the source language" etc. which can be controversial, and perhaps not all of you will agree with me.

In the first part of my lecture I would like to give a state of art review about the love-hate relationship between linguistics and TS. After this I will speak about the revival of Contrastive Linguistics in general and in connection with TS in particular.

In the third part of my lecture I will introduce some new concepts, for example the concept of "dynamic contrastive approach", "translational behaviour of languages", "translation-oriented description of languages" and in the last section I will speak about my research and a series of textbooks based on this research aiming to give a translation oriented description of Hungarian contrasting with four Indo-European languages: English, German, French and Russian on the basis of operations carried out by translators translating from Hungarian into English, German, French and Russian and vice versa.

1. The Recent Status of Linguistics in Translation Studies

Peter Fawcett writes in the introduction of his new book *Translation and Language* that the relationship between linguistics and translation theory can be characterized as a love-hate relationship. "Many linguists have no interest in translation theory, and some translation theorists are increasingly declaring that linguistics has nothing to offer their discipline" (Fawcett 1997: Foreword).

1.1. Anti-Linguistic Approaches

In the newly published *Dictionary of Translation Studies* under the title "Linguistic Approach" we find the following definition:

"A term used to refer any approach which views translation as simply a question of replacing the linguistic units of ST with "equivalent" TL units without reference to factors such as context or connotation." (Shuttleworth 1997: 94)

In the also newly published *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* under the title "Didactics of translation" Hans Vermeer writes the followings:

"For many people, translating still means rendering a text from one language into another.... The translator's task then ends with the linguistic production of a target text. Translational skill is acquired by exercises based on linguistic equivalence rules of the type: 'translate German adverbs by a Spanish final verb plus que construction and vice versa'. (1998:61)

In their introduction to their new series on translation studies for Routledge, Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere wrote about the so called "cultural turn" in translation studies, when "The reader will no longer find painstaking comparisons between originals and translations " (1990: 4).

Nowadays this anti-linguistic approach in Translation Studies became so popular, that on the 2nd International Transfere Necesse Est conference in Budapest, where the section *Translation and Linguistics* was indeed the smallest section of the conference, one of the speakers in the linguistic section, Irena Kovacic sadly remarked that:

"bad reputation is difficult to overcome: no wonder linguists have either lost initiative or come to feel unwelcome among translation scholars." (Kovacic 1998:225)

1.2 Pro-Linguistic Approaches

Fortunately there are also several more balanced approaches among translation scholars. Mona Baker in her article *Linguistics and Cultural Studies* feels that cultural studies are

"unduly set in opposition to what some would present as the boring, lifeless structural analysis, which derive from linguistics. She puts the question: "And is linguistics at any rate really as naive and unproductive as it is sometimes presented by proponents of this alternative paradigm?" (Baker 1996:9-10)

Peter Fawcett the author of the book *Translation and Language* also represents a moderate point of view stating: "...there are many things in translation which can only be described and explained by linguistics".

Michael Hoey sees the relevance of CA to translation in the following:

"At a practical level, it is probably most useful in pointing out areas where direct translation of a term or phrase will not convey accurately in the second language the intended meaning of the first. At a global level, it leads the translator to look at broader issues such as whether the structure of the discourse for a given text-type is the same in both languages." (Hoey 1998:47)

1.3. The Place of Linguistics in TS

As for myself I am a linguist and I firmly believe in the important role of linguistics in TS.

Linguistics, playing a major role in early TS, has indeed become a rather neglected field in the 70's and 80's even often accused of simplifying the complex phenomenon of translation.

To banish linguistics from TS is going into the other extreme. Emphasizing the importance of "cultural turn" in TS we should not forget that neither the result nor the process of translation from any Source Language to any Target Language can be independent of the differences and similarities of the two languages.

Linguistic differences and similarities between languages are of course meant here in the broadest sense of "linguistics", taking into consideration not only properties of the systems of two languages but also discourse structures, registers, and - as I will explain later - the translational "behaviour" of different languages-pairs towards each other.

In my lecture I will argue, that enormous body of knowledge accumulated in linguistics, that is in contrastive linguistics, text-linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics should not be ignored in the description and explanation of translator's activity. Even the less welcome branch of L that is CL can have a word in investigation of the most complex phenomenon of translation.

Today I take the liberty and I will devote my lecture to the most neglected part of the translation chain to the Source Language. I will examine how the SL or SLs behave in the encounter with different Target Languages.

It does not mean of course that I neglect the role of the other approaches. And it does not mean either that all decisions made by translators can be explained by linguistic contrasts. But I think that investigating of differences between SL and TL also must have a place in TS. If we recall James Holmes' basic map of Translation Studies, somewhere in the lower left corner it has to be a modest place for comparisons made between the SL and TL (Toury 1995).

In my book *The theory and practice of translation* (Klaudy 1994) where I give a detailed description of operations made by translators translating from H into IE languages and vice versa I differentiate three types of operations:

- (1) language-specific operations
- (2) culture-specific operations
- (3) translation-specific operations (universals)

All what will be said in my lecture today will serve the better understanding of the first type of operations: the language specific operations, and the role of contrastive linguistics in the description and explanation of language-specific operations.

2. The Role of Contrastive Linguistics in TS

It is the contrastive linguistics what has undoubtedly the worst reputation among the above mentioned branches of linguistics. Those translation scholars who are inclined to make concessions in case of text linguistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics definitely refuse the usefulness and explanatory power of contrastive linguistics in TS.

And it is no wonder, since contrastive linguistics went over a serious crisis in the 80-ies, and was refused by many of his own proponents as well.

2.1. The Failure of CL in SLA and TS

CA or CL, by definition of Michael Hoey, is "a linguistic study of two languages aiming to identify differences between them in general or in selected areas" (1998:46).

It is well known that the major influence on the development of the CA has been the

interest shown in it by language teachers and learners, and much CA has been undertaken with language teaching ... in mind. (Hoey 1998: 46). CA had to be predict difficulties in SL acquisition, and prevent errors in learner's production. But when it became apparent that it did not adequately explain or prevent problems of language learning CL began to lose its popularity. Larry Selinker in his book *Rediscovering Interlanguage* published in 1992, puts the question: "Why would one have believed ... that by comparing abstract linguistic structures one would necessarily learn about 'the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning' a second language (Selinker 1992:11).

Later something similar happened with CL in TS. In early TS CL was also used in order to predict difficulties and prevent errors in translation. And the CL failed again. Firstly, the translation problems did not coincide with differences between the SL and TL, secondly, the identification of contrasts between the SL and TL could not prevent the errors in translations.

2.2. The Comeback of CL

Looking back at the causes of this failure from a 20 years perspective, Larry Selinker is warning against the baby and the bathwater syndrome. He suggests that, the failure in diagnosing students difficulties accurately does not mean that we have to discard the entire enterprise of CA. He think that CA recently has made a very successful comeback (Selinker 1992:11)

The comeback of contrastive linguistics is also mentioned in R.K. Hartmann's preface to the new book of Basil Hatim on translation theory and text linguistics, published in 1997.

"Both contrastive linguistics and text linguistics are now in their prime...the application of contrastive text linguistics to translation studies is long overdue. "
(Preface to Hatim 1997)

The author of the book Basil Hatim begins the discussion with the following sentence:

"One useful way of seeing contrastive linguistics at work is through translation, and an interesting way of looking into the translation process is perhaps through an examination of the kind of decisions which translators make in handling texts." (Hatim 1997:1)

Michael Hoey sees the future of CL in TS in corpus linguistics, in using parallel corpora in TS.

"An important future function of CA is likely to be in the area of collocation, where parallel concordancing based on comaparable corpora....The future of CA's use in translation may well lie in projects such as this, which are capable of providing with equal facility explanations of past translating decisions and guidance as to prospective ones." (Hoey 1998:49)

2.3. The New (Dynamic) Approach to CL in TS

Perhaps drawing a lesson form the previous failure of CL in TS we have to find other

ways of its application.

In my paper I would like to suggest a new concept of application of CL in TS what I will call dynamic contrastive approach or process oriented contrastive approach.

In my view CL have to be used not for comparison of the SL and TL system or the SL and TL texts that is the product of translation, but for the examination of the **process** of translation. CL has to give explanation of operations carried out by translators when they step over from the SL text to the TL text.

I suggest to replace the **product oriented contrastive approach** by the **process oriented** contrastive approach.

What I mean by process oriented contrastive approach? Process oriented approaches in linguistics investigate **how languages actually function**, process oriented contrastive approach in TS describes **how two languages function together**

Defining my own approach I would like to return to Basil Hatim's words: "One useful way of seeing contrastive linguistics at work is through translation..." I would like to emphasize the expression: **contrastive linguistics at work**. Something similar was formulated by Eugene Nida 30 years ago: "Perhaps translation can also provide a **dynamic typology** of languages".

The dynamic dimension of the contrastive approach can be based on the following assumptions:

As it is well known the traditional CL deals with differences between languages on **langue-level**, on the level of language systems. The contrastive text-linguistics, - which is more welcome in TS - deals with differences between languages on **parole-level** that is on the level of concrete realizations of systems that is on textual level.

The dynamic approach, we suggest, wants to go even further. It seeks contrasts between SL and TL neither in their system nor in the textual realizations in their system but on the way from the thought to the language form that is in mental strategies. The same message is encoded in a different way in different languages. These differences between languages which remain unnoticed for monolingual speakers but they will be apparent in the process of translation we call translational or dynamic contrasts.

The success or applicability of CL in TS depends on what kind of contrasts we are looking for:

- (1) system contrasts
- (2) textual contrasts
- (3) translational or dynamic contrasts

This kind of dynamic contrastive approach - which I think can be really useful for TS - deals not with different systems or different surface structures but with different **encoding strategies** characteristic for different languages. The differences in encoding strategies which come into life only in the process of translation that is dynamic contrasts I will call metaphorically: **translational behaviour of languages**.

3. The Theory of "Dynamic Contrasts"

3.1 The Idea of "Translational Behaviour of Languages"

The idea that there is something what can be called "translational behaviour of languages" came into my mind 20 years ago, when I was a novice translator, and was working together with different editors of the Europa Publishing House in Budapest. While revising my

translation they tried justify their solutions, tried to explain me what they are doing and why. They were not linguists at all but their intuitive observations concerned mainly linguistic topics. It is possible that they mentioned the users expectations or the literary canon but I already can't remember. Their intuitive explanations contained a lot of very witty intuitive observations about the differences between languages. What was especially interesting for me that they often personificated the languages, they often mentioned how languages behave themselves when the are translated into each other.

- (1) "The Hungarian likes to use verbs when IE languages use nouns."
- (2) "The Hungarian likes to use active when IE languages use passive."
- (3) "When you translate from IE languages into Hungarian you have to begin the translation from the end of the sentence."
- (4) "The Hungarian can not manage the long chains of complements in preposition to the nouns."
- (5) "The IE languages force the Hungarian to use this long nominal chains but we do not like this."
- (6) "The IE languages could not evoke the whole richness of Hungarian verbs."
- (7) "When translating form Indo-European languages an impoverishment of the Hungarian language takes place - against with the translators have to struggle etc."

I don't know whether my translations became better or not consequently, but I remember that a totally new world began to open up for me. I realised that from the viewpoint of the translation from Indo-European languages there are such a properties of Hungarian, which properties are not described in the Hungarian grammar books. It was 20 years ago when I decided to find some linguistic explanations for this intuitive comments on translational behaviour of languages in general and Hungarian language in particular.

3.2. The Concept of "Translational Behaviour of Languages"

First I would like to explain, what I mean by translational behaviour of languages?

The term "translational behaviour" is not new in TS. It is used widely by a lot of scholars in connection with the behaviour of translators, with the "laws of translational behaviour" (Toury 1995: 259-279).

But as I have mentioned earlier I use this term metaphorically, I refer it not to translators but to languages. I speak for example about translational behaviour of English towards Hungarian, translational behaviour of Hungarian towards German etc. On what ground?

I try to illustrate my approach with a simple example. Everybody knows that the same text means different things to the simple reader, the professional reader and the translator. When I look at the text as a simple reader, I should not bother with the SL form because my purpose is to understand the information conveyed by the text. When I look at the same text with purpose to rewrite it on the same language (in order to adapting, abstracting etc.), the SL form already becomes more important. And finally, when I look at the same text with the purpose to translate it the same text begins to show such properties which could not bee seen earlier. The text which behaved friendly towards me when I was a simple reader, may became my enemy when I want to translate it.

What is the reason for that phenomenon, that the translator's activity brings into life the

linguistic properties of the text? It is a commonplace that while contrastive linguistics has to do with language systems - translation studies has to do not with language systems but with their realisations that is with texts. This is unquestionable fact. All texts are unique, complete and final - one might say "frozen" realisations of the language system, until we do not touch them, do not want to use them for specific purposes. Translation of the SL text means to use it for a very specific purpose. When we would like to rewrite the text in an other language, we bring into life the SL system, which begins to resist to the reshaping, reformulating, and this resistance have to be overcome by translators.

3.3. Resistance of the SL

Resistance or importance of the SL form is generally mentioned only in connection with the expressive that is literary texts, when the SL form is inseparable from the content, the form is an organic part of the message. In the informative text type, when the primary aim is to convey information to the receiver the SL form generally regarded something .

The resistance of the SL is a relative concept, it always depends of the actual TL(s). Cognate languages can be easily translated into each other that is show less resistance than non-cognate languages. That is the reason to call them **friendly language-pairs**.

Remote languages (Indoeuropean vs Finno-Ugric) may behave very **unfriendly** with each other in the process of translation, forcing the translators/ interpreters carry out amazing mental gymnastics, which can be fatal for unprepared translators/interpreters.

How to overcome the resistance of the SL:

There are two ways for it:

1. The first - suggested by the interpretive theory of translation - to ignore the linguistic properties of SL text, concentrate on the context (Shuttleworth 1997).
2. The second - proposed in this lecture - to **raise awareness or consciousness** but not of the SL and TL systems, (it is the task of contrastive linguistics), but awareness of the translational behaviour of certain SL towards different TLs awareness of dynamic contrasts.

This awareness or consciousness raising activity have to be supported with the translation oriented description of different language pairs, and this kind of description has to have a well defined place in TS.

3.4. Translation Oriented Description of Languages

What I mean by translation-oriented description of languages? What are the main differences between the contrastive (CL or CTL) description and the translation oriented (TO) description of languages.

- (1)
 - CL description is **langue-oriented**, describes the differences between the SL system and the TL system (for instance prepositions in the English and French using Catford's example (Catford 1965);
 - CTL description is **parole-oriented**; describes the differences in organisation of the SL and TL texts, the differences in cohesive devices, topic-comment structure etc. as it made by Basil Hatim in his last book concerning the English-Arabic translation (Hatim 1997).
 - TO description is **norm-oriented**; describes the habitual translational operations which carried out by translators on a regular base to overcome the

difficulties due to the different translational behaviour of languages.

- (2) While CL description is **static**, TO description is **dynamic**; it describes two languages functioning together, or two languages in use;
- (3) While CL description concerns the **complete systems** of the languages, TO description concerns only that properties which are relevant in the process of translation, which manifest themselves in the **specific translational behaviour** of the SL towards a specific TL.

I would like to illustrate these different approaches with an example. Investigating personal pronoun in English and Hungarian:

- (1) CL description deals with question of *gender, number, case*, etc.,
- (2) CTL description deals with question of *reference function, anaphora, cataphora* etc.,
- (3) TO description deals with different operations carried out by translators in order to avoid the misunderstandings which can occur because of the **automatic generalization** of personal pronoun in English-Hungarian translation; or because of the **automatic omission** of personal pronoun in English-Hungarian translation (for example deliberate concretization of personal pronoun by '*girl*', '*women*', proper name etc.,)

In order to lay the foundations for the culture-specific operations as well, translation-oriented description of **languages** can be supplemented by the translation oriented description of **cultures**. There are some very interesting suggestions on this subject made by Heidrun Witte in her article *Contrastive Culture Learning in Translation Training* which I will refer later. (Witte 1996).

4. Translation Oriented Description of Hungarian towards the Indo-European languages

In the last five years my main concern was to give a translation oriented description of Hungarian language towards four Indo-European languages: Russian, English, German, French.

In accordance with my dynamic approach the description was made on the basis of operations carried on by translators translating from Hungarian into Indo-European languages and vice versa.

The surveying of operations was made mainly by my students, trainees translators at the Interpreter and Translator Training Center at the University of Budapest, who have to do this work as a term-paper at the end of their first year of tuition.

They analysed around 400 literary work translated from Indo-European languages Russian, English, German, French into Hungarian and vice-versa. Their task was describe and try to explain what translators actually did in the process of translation and why.

As a guideline they could use my book *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, where I gave a detailed basic taxonomy of operations with three main types (language-specific, culture-

specific and translation-proper operations) and a number of subtypes (Klaudy 1994, 1995, 1996).

5. Conclusion: Static vs Dynamic Approaches to Language and Culture

Translation is a dynamic way of contrasting languages and cultures.

Both the contrastive linguistics and cultural studies play an important role in TS as auxiliary sciences. And their usefulness for TS depends on, whether we approach them in a static or a dynamic way.

The static way in investigating the cultural phenomena means - as it is explained by Heidrun Witte in her article *Contrastive Culture Learning in Translation Training* - the traditional content-orientation in cultural studies which limits itself to "facts" and "units"; while the dynamic approach, suggested her, takes into account "**culture specific behaviour patterns**" (Witte 1996:73).

The static way in investigating linguistic differences between languages, as we have above explained, means giving an inventory of differences between the SL and TL. The dynamic way, as we have suggested in this lecture, concentrates on the dynamic contrasts, on the differences of **encoding strategies** characteristic for different languages, which come into life only in the process of translation, which I call metaphorically: **translational behaviour of languages**. Friendly or unfriendly translational behaviour of language-pairs towards each other requires language specific operations in translations. Describing and explaining language specific operations in translation we may give a translation-oriented description of different language pairs.

Introducing the term **dynamic contrasts** metaphorically called translational behaviour of languages and attempting to give a translation oriented description of different language-pairs I tried to discover rules governing the seemingly subjective decisions of translators.

I deliberately did not raise the question of applicability of this description in translator training. I deliberately did not raise the question whether that this kind of "interlinguistic awareness" will improve the transfer competence of translators or not, because I think, this is typically a question which can not be answered without sufficient experimental evidence.

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